



Food processing firm eyes growth

August 08, 2008

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Grand River Foods is considering adding a fourth food processing line and adding 35 jobs this winter, president Craig Richardson said yesterday.

It's this type of success story that is the motivation behind the \$3-million Food and Beverage Processing Innovation Fund. Cambridge MP Gary Goodyear announced the creation of the federal-provincial fund yesterday at Grand River Food's new headquarters in Cambridge.

"We will absolutely be applying to this fund," Richardson said following the announcement.

Besides the possible addition of the new production line, Grand River Foods will invest \$500,000 in its research and development activities locally. The company plans to renovate part of its Vondrau Drive headquarters over the next month to create a microbiological laboratory, test kitchen and product innovation area.

Richardson said the food processing business has grown beyond its own internal expectations and now employs 180 people locally. Its Boxwood Drive plant processes chicken, beef and pork into a variety of frozen food products.

Having an innovation fund is the latest step to promote Ontario's food processing industry, which employs more than 110,000 people and generates \$33 billion in sales.

Richardson said the industry ranks second only to the automotive sector in terms of its importance to Ontario's manufacturing economy.

Despite the success of companies like Grand River Foods and Elmira Poultry, which is investing millions of dollars to expand its Waterloo plant, the food processing industry does not resonate with skilled college and university graduates.

"We find it difficult at times to recruit high-skilled labour for our plant," Richardson said. "We've done a lousy job (as an industry) in the past informing the public that we even exist."

Goodyear said the fund is part of a larger federal strategy to help innovative manufacturers.

He said this approach is the best way to help industry in difficult times.

"They're happy with what the federal government has done by taking a multi-faceted approach and not subsidizing and choosing winners and losers."

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